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ABSTRACT

An 8-month practicum was developed to eliminate the communication gap experienced by parents moving from the multi-communicative atmosphere of the elementary school to the relatively incidental reporting environment of the junior high school. The practicum sought to increase home-school communication through parental awareness and involvement. An unexpected outcome was the intensity of teacher resistance to parental involvement, causing a shift in the practicum's focus from awareness to political involvement. Subjects were 72 parents of sixth- through ninth-grade students, and an unspecified number of teachers and students. Parents collaborated on publishing a newsletter, writing letters, and organizing educational forums to foster debate on issues of education specific to their children and the school environment. Increased parental involvement led to the establishment of school committees seeking to replace the junior high school with a middle school. Results of the practicum indicated that the solutions to many of the problems with the school were political, and that understanding the power base of both teachers and the union is a necessary precept to any parental action for improved home-school communication. (Ten appendices include questionnaires and post-program surveys, workshop handouts, a home-school relations checklist, and a letter from parents to the newspaper. Contains 26 references. (SM)

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A Parent Awareness Program for the Junior High School Setting With a Focus on Proactive Communication Through a Political Empowerment of Parents.

by

Richard J. Marchesani

Cluster 43

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A Practicum II Report presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1993

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Sheila Vandeveer

Sheila Vandeveer

Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Rome City School District
Rome, New York

August 31, 1993

This practicum report was submitted by Richard J. Marchesani under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

5/24/94
Date of Final Approval of Report

Georgianna Lowen
Dr. Georgianna Lowen, Ed.D. Adviser

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A special note goes to my 1992-93 eighth grade students who answered questions, completed surveys and gave me some terribly honest insight about education research.

Finally, I acknowledge the person who endured three years and two practicums of erratic behavior from her husband - Laurie, my wife, running partner, critic, cheerleader and fan.

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ABSTRACT

A Parent Awareness Program for the Junior High School Setting with a Focus on Proactive Communication Through a Political Empowerment of Parents. Marchesani, Richard J., 1993: Practicum Report, Nova University. Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Family Influence/Student Attitude/ Parent Responsibility/Secondary Education/Middle Schools/ Junior High Schools/Parent Teacher Cooperation/Parent School Responsibility/Parent Participation/School Policy

This practicum sought to erase the communication gap which parents experience when moving from the multi-communicative atmosphere of the elementary school to the relatively negative incidental reporting of the junior high school. Parents of sixth through ninth grade students participated in an organized program to increase home-school communication and provide parents with information and strategies to become involved in the school community.

Parents collaborated on newsletter publication, letter writing, and the organizing of educational forums to foster debate on issues of education specific to their children and the school environment. The parents actively sought information concerning everyday school affairs and focused much of their communication on improving parental awareness. Their active involvement led to activation of school committees seeking change to a middle school configuration.

Analysis of the results revealed that parental participation in the communication between school and home has a positive effect on student achievement; and that parental activism in the policy-making structure of the school district causes educators to acknowledge the parental voice in school administration. The teachers' union and the school board members recognized parents as a political factor beyond that of just voting taxpayers.

Permission Statement

As a student in the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies, I do give my permission to Nova University to distribute copies of this practicum report on request from interested individuals. It is my understanding that Nova University will not charge for this dissemination except to cover the costs of microfiching, handling, and mailing of the materials.

October 10, 1993 Richard J. Marchesani

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

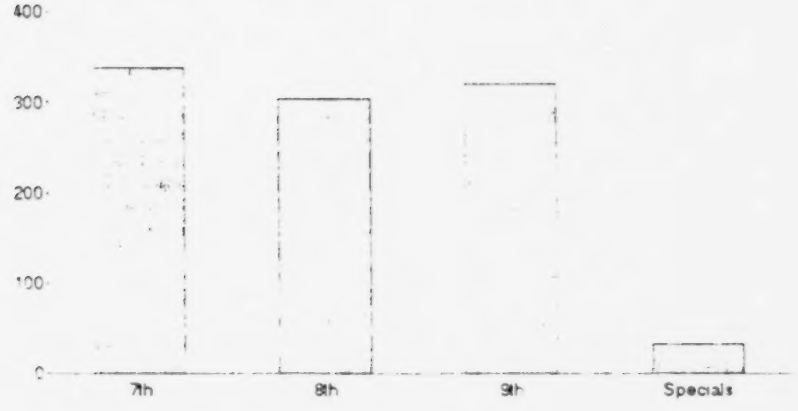
Description of Community

The setting for this practicum was a junior high school in a small Northeastern urban community. The city's rich American heritage reaches to a pre-revolutionary war period resplendent with both familiar names and places that mark our country's history. The 44,350 people who comprise the population, are mostly white, middle class suburbanites and city-dwellers whose average salary borders on the state average of $27,308 (Local Chamber of Commerce, 1992). Originally a city with a number of copper and brass mills employing high numbers of immigrants, the establishment of a military air base at the close of World War II provided a source of employment which is preponderant to this day. As industry waned during the last three recessions, the military's economic influence increased, especially in the area of technology. This created a large segment of high salaried positions for engineers, contract and procurement specialists and a host of support personnel most of whom were locally hired (Jim Riccardi, personal communication, September 8, 1992).

The city's exclusive reliance upon the military presence has finally proved fatal to its economy, as it was included on the July 1993 base closing and realignment list. The anticipated impact on the community includes a 25 to 33 percent reduction in the school district's student population. The full realization of the cutbacks will not be realized, however, until July 1995.

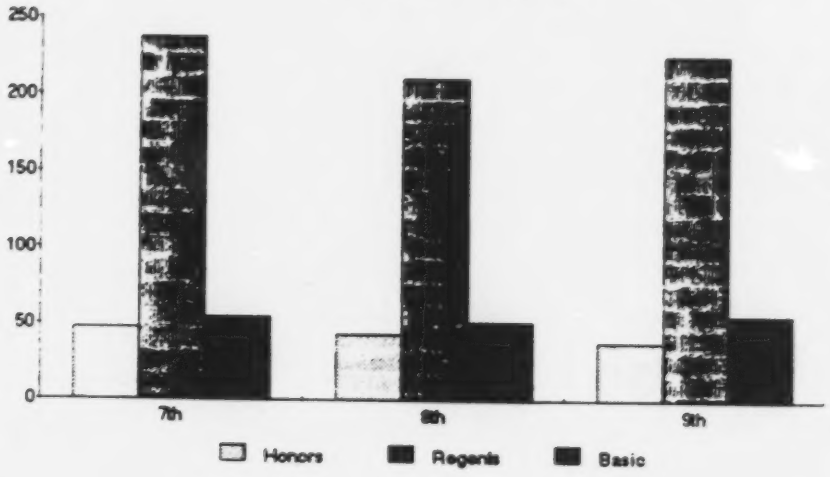
Presently, the school district has a student complement of 7800 and a professional staff of 586 (City School District, 1992). The junior high school, which is the setting of this practicum, has a population of 995 for the three grades (Figure 1).

Figure 1
School Population - 1992-93
995



This district tracks by ability and uses a three-tiered system labeled Honors, Regents (the terms 'Regents' is a district euphemism for average ability students), and Basic (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Ability Rankings By Grade



In recent years, the professional staff of this school has become quite varied, primarily due to the federal requirements of Public Law 94-142 which has necessitated the hiring of many additional special education teachers and aides. Accordingly, the staff composition is as follows:

81 classroom teachers
9 teachers' aides
1 school psychologist
1 speech pathologist
11 teachers for children with special needs
1 principal
1 assistant principal
3 guidance counselors
1-1/2 librarians
1 computer monitor
7 secretaries
1 school nurse

The writer is an eighth grade English teacher with 23 years teaching experience, all at the target school. During that time he has coordinated a mini-course program, participated in the development of the seventh and eighth grade curriculums, and directed programs drama and extracurricular activities. As a classroom teacher, he has taught all ability ranges primarily in grades seven and eight and for a brief time, the ninth grade Regents (average-ability students as designated in New York State).

As a long time "resident" of this particular school, the history of parental involvement is well known to the writer which provides a fund of information from which to draw for the problem solution. Tantamount to understanding the problem is knowledge not only of the system, but also of factors which impact the community, the students and the staff.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

When coming to this junior high school, parents suffered a culture shock. Enjoying open-armed participatory environment of the elementary school, parents are often shocked at the total absence of invitational involvement by the junior high school. Parental communication in this junior high is completely one way - school to home. The history of parental involvement reveals peripheral contact which has never expanded beyond fund-raising and chaperoning. The school has not sought parental opinion or feedback, but has provided instructional and notational information as required to serve its functions. Parents felt excluded and certainly uninvolved.

Beyond the situational contacts regarding attendance, academic deficiencies or behavior problems, parents are invited to a single open house which is held in late September. School-initiated communication carries the implication that parental assistance is exclusive of their children's education. The evidence of this problem was quickly revealed through conversations with parents of students from all three

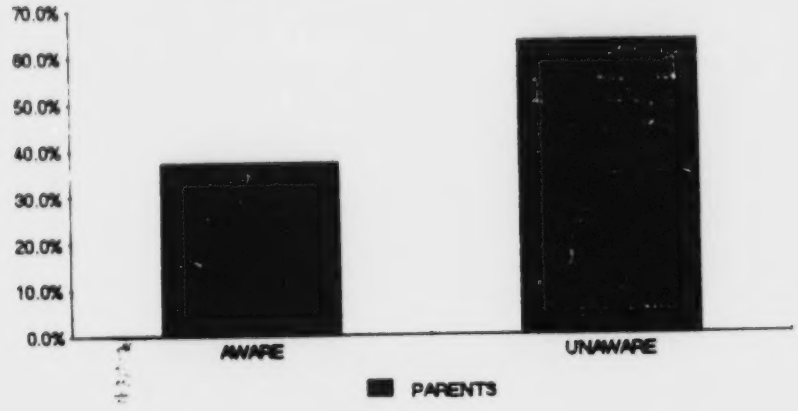
ability levels and through written surveys in which isolation is a main theme.

Problem Documentation

Telephone surveys have revealed that 63% of parents questioned about honor and merit roll requirements were unaware of the numerical cutoffs or even of deadlines. Knowledge of California Achievement Test (CAT) jargon such as stanines and percentiles was limited (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Are you aware of what the terms 'stanine' and 'percentile' mean on your child's California Achievement Test Score?



This was corroborated by the three guidance counselors who had said that parents generally were unaware of the meanings of the scores until explained. Beyond this, the implication of CAT scores for their

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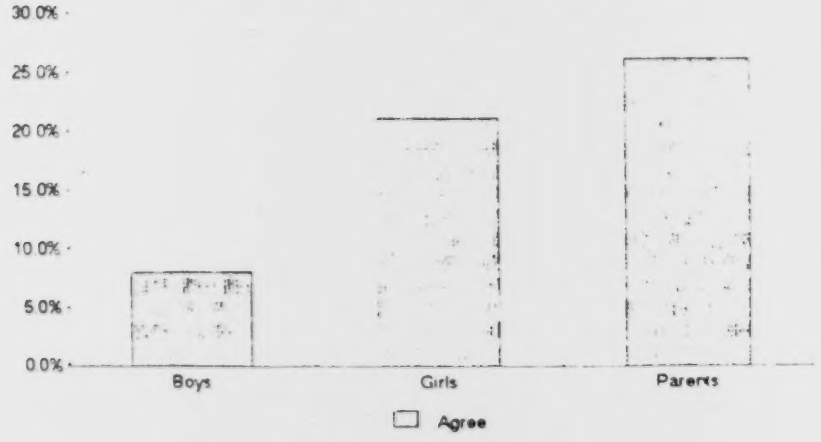
children's future academic placement was a mystery to all but three of the 51 parents interviewed by phone.

Even chaperoning is haphazard and situational. Last year, a log kept by the writer revealed that a total of 16 parents chaperoned the eight dances with most of them being the same for each dance. Many parents interviewed said that they would have chaperoned had they known they could, but generally felt that they needed to be invited. Affecting this issue are the students themselves, who generally indicated in their surveys that they did not desire to have their parents at the dances.

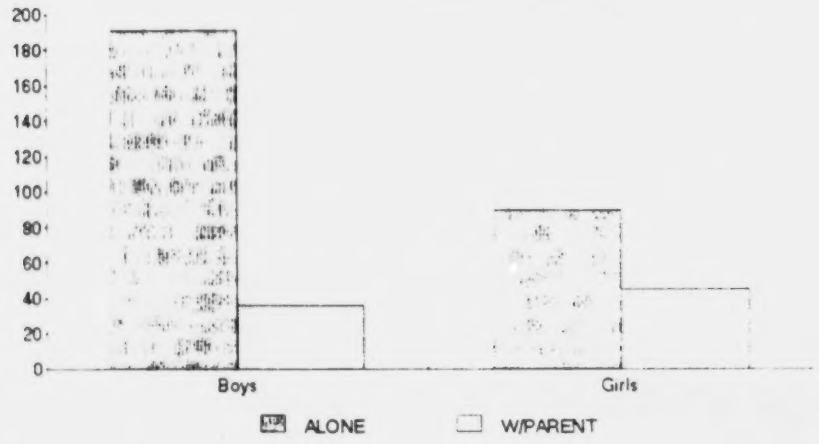
Academically, teachers indicated in a survey that student unpreparedness was a major problem causing low achievement. And yet, 89 out of 120 parents revealed that their children were getting too much homework with the students agreeing with parents (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Should students receive more homework?



Students were ambivalent about parental assistance on the homework with a majority stating that they like for their parents to help but revealed that they do their homework on their own for the most part (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Do your parents help you with your homework or do you mostly do it alone?



A clear lack of bedtime and curfew hours was cited by the students while teachers felt that this was crucial to performance levels in school. Conversations with parents indicated that many were confused as to what was appropriate for a bedtime curfew for this age. What was plainly obvious was that parents were in need

of dialogue among themselves, with their children's teachers and with the school administration.

What complicated the understanding of the problem was that the school does in fact disseminated a broad range of information in order to keep parents informed. The mails were filled with letters and reports to parents concerning behavior problems, academic deficiencies and information requests. The personnel office maintained an ineligible list which tracked a student's fail status and notified parents when three fails were made in any one subject. There were frequent mailings of assigned detentions, in-school and out-of-school suspensions and letters referring to chronic behavior problems. Parents were called on every occasion of a child's absence.

Causative Analysis

The gap that exists between school and parent is a cause both obvious and subtle. The obvious reason is that elementary schools usually have populations of less than 400 students with each teacher having accepted the complete behavioral and academic progress for 25 to 30 students. Junior high school propels students into eight separate instructional and/or supervised periods with the possibility of from five to eight separate teachers. Each teacher is responsible for the academic and behavioral records of 80 to 120

students with an additional maintenance of 30 students in a studyhall situation. Teachers simply have too many students under their charge to cater to a personal contact system with parents. The instructional day is scheduled too tightly to leave room for many parent conferences, and the sheer weight of paper correction often stymies a teacher's inclination to initiate communication which isn't necessary.

The subtle causes of this problem existed in the inference of those home communications. The school's notification process consisted of a heavy flow of information dealing entirely with the negative aspect of the student's life at the school. Letters, forms, and phone calls that parents receive, all deal with lack of academic progress, behavioral disruptions or absence from school. The message sent to parents was that the school is in control, is concerned about the safety of the children and wishes them [the parents] to know precisely when the student is 'stepping out of line'. The surveys indicate that parents, students and teachers all agree that this school is safe and comfortable. In light of the 1990's streak of violence being reported in our nation's schools, this is a fact that should be a great source of pride. However, it hides the main issue, the subtle issue - that the communication being sent home was informative but

negative in nature; it does not help the parent to understand any better what is being taught, how its being taught and what they, as parents, can do to help. It does not assist the parent to define his or her role in the education of the child.

In this particular district and specifically to this school, parental influence is limited to attendance of school board meetings where members of the public are allowed to speak to any issue, but board members do not respond due to a self-imposed gag rule. The last bastion of influence is through the voting booth which, although effective, is a slow and often frustrating process.

Relationship of Problem to the Literature

The barriers confronting the parents of this school were quite common - as the literature attests. Parents were not always welcome into the school community. Indeed many professional educators were distrustful, even sneering of parental intrusion. William Snider (1991) reporting on the power sharing by parents of the Chicago school system, found that many parents were chided by teachers and administrators for their arrogance in thinking they could run the schools. Administrators and teachers are caught in a Catch 22 as they seek parental involvement but don't want parental interference. The definition of those terms may well

be the point around which spins success in bringing into the circle of educational responsibility. The increasing role of parents on governing bodies in local schools has educators nervous and fearful of events that may occur when equality of rule is attained (Shanker, 1991) (Seeley, 1991). Educators argue that the process is cumbersome enough without adding parents as yet another player in the management game.

For teachers this threat takes on a real image in the guise of volunteerism. At a conference for School-Related Personnel (SRP), New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) representatives warned SRPs (Facing the privatization threat, 1992) that parents coming into the building to help with math, computer skills or even to decorate a classroom, may be jeopardizing their jobs. NYSUT argues that school boards are using parent volunteerism to cut costs and to establish precedents for contracting out for work that could be done by their own people.

Teachers' fear of outside influence also stems from a long held distrust of legislators and school boards who make policy without expertise. Linda Darling-Hammond (1991), educator-reformer, believes that legislative control and top-down management stems from the basic premise that teachers cannot be trusted to "make responsible, educationally appropriate

judgments". Lack of unified rules for teacher preparation and supervision cause suspicion and lack of acceptance of teachers as professionals (p.64). This distrust may well be the cause of educator paranoia when parents come "into the building". It is clearly a matter of respect - a fragile respect which may be jeopardized if parents were allowed to interfere in matters for which they are not trained nor skilled enough to recognize as being educationally appropriate.

Parents may view education through their own childhood preceptors which found the teacher at the front of the room and the students sitting straight in soldierly rows. Today's classroom may look chaotic and seem noisy when collaborative learning is taking place. Will the parent understand what is going on? Or will he or she voice dissent? This fear by teachers is real as a teacher writing to the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* exemplifies. He took exception to a local dentist who had been elected to a school advisory committee: "..I ought to have laid hands on my dentist friend..backed him into his own reclining chair and explained to him that I was conducting an investigation of local dental conditions and standards.." (quoted in Snider, 1991).

Child psychiatrist James Comer (1992) feels that a cooperative attitude between school and home brings about a reduction in behavioral problems both at home

and in school. However, the basis for this cooperation is that the school community set its expectations for the children to coincide with the social network outside the school. Comer views the school's chief responsibility as being cognizant of the society which sends their children to the school. A common barrier between school and home is that the school's goals and objectives run counter to what is happening at home. In the home a child may well be quite efficient in domestic chores and generally secure only to be placed in a low track for math and reading and generally made to feel insecure. Without communication, the parent would not understand the source of her child's feelings of failure and indeed may be seen as the perpetrator of such feelings by the school.

Clearly, the evidence of parental influence is strong. Lamborn et al conducted a study in 1990 which is a model for many such studies which show how parental neglect and lack of concern have a direct effect on academic achievement. Using a four category matrix comprised of authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent and neglectful parents, the research team correlated these with eleven dependent variables ranging from delinquency to self-reliance. The results were statistically significant and supported the hypothesis that "adolescents who characterize their

parents as authoritative, demonstrate the most positive levels of competence and adjustment across the different outcome variables" (p. 1057). Also significant in this study was that students who characterize their parents as being neglectful reported the poorest outcomes across all sets of dependent measures.

The implication of these results supports the concept of parental effect upon the student's achievement and social adjustment in the school community.

Conversely, teacher antagonism to parental "interference" affects the student as a "they" vs "us" philosophy (Gips & Burdin, 1983) and polarizes the home and school. Teachers can easily intimidate parents during a conference on grades and performance by using a tone which directs blame towards the home (Demoulin, 1992). Parents can intimidate teachers by voicing opposition to instructional strategies of which they are not familiar (Bell, Roubinek & Southard, 1989).

Cooperation between home and school is easily destroyed by these fears and prejudices which find their roots in miscommunication, misunderstanding and lack of purpose or direction.

Fittingly, a sense of community between school and home is not just a good idea, it is a necessity if

healthy development for the child is going to occur. Schlechty (1991) calls for school personnel to view their mission as a service to the student-client in what he calls the "hospital" school. This means, of course, that we can no longer ignore the where and how of the child's home life. The school needs to be informed if there is a divorce, a serious family crisis or a persistent behavior problem at home. Teaching the subject as opposed to teaching the child may well be a paradigm shift in rapid motion. Bringing the home into the school, however, cannot be achieved without a loud communication broadcast to the parents.

There is a great deal of difference between inviting parents to school to discuss problems and inviting them to discuss teaching techniques and parenting strategies and course content. The parent is part of the solution and to exclude them from the process of education is to exclude a tremendous source of power for change (Gauld, 1992). Asking parents to invest their time and abilities begins to establish that sense of community so necessary for child development.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

Communication between home and school is an essential ingredient to both student scholastic achievement and responsible adolescent behavior. The goal of this practicum is to improve that communication through parental awareness and involvement, and to establish an active network between home and school. It is a reasonable expectation that the parents who come under the purview of this program, will demonstrate some degree of increased awareness, interest and participation in their children's educational life. Secondary to this would be a noticeable improvement of behavior in the home and in the school as adolescents become aware of the increased interest and collaboration between their parents/guardians, and school personnel.

Expected Outcomes

An increase in parental awarenesof the school's mission and day-to-day requirements relative to the student is certainly a chief expected outcome of this practicum. Consequently the following itemized expectations were selected for this practicum:

1. At least 65% of parents surveyed at the completion of the implementation process will understand the requirements for the honor and merit rolls. Information on this topic includes the cutoff grades as well as the necessary time sequences involved.

2. There will be an increase of at least 10% of parental requests for academic progress reports. This may take the form of a phone call to the guidance office or a verbal request made by the student.

3. At least 65% of parents surveyed on the post-program survey (See Appendix F) will reflect an understanding of the jargon used regarding CAT score testing. "Understanding" means a knowledge of the general meanings of such terms as *percentiles* and *stanines*, and not the technical application of such terms.

4. There will be in operation a bi-monthly newsletter for vocal concerns on the education and development of their children with contributions from parents, teachers and students. This newsletter will be mainly constructed by the parents and students with teacher cooperation and use of school facilities.

5. A core group of parents trained in parenting strategies will be in existence, and will form an

ongoing committee offering seminars for parental participation. This core will be supplied materials and data from the writer, the school district, the state education department and the regional cooperative educational facility.

6. A post-program survey of students (See Appendix E) will reveal at least a 20% increase of parental assistance on homework, which will be defined as any form of collaborative event in which parent and child communicates on matters relating to school

7. At least four parent-teacher hosted meetings will be held in the school to address academic, physical and philosophical problems relating to the educational process in the building. These meetings will spearhead the parental involvement movement with emphasis on family initiative.

8. The parent-teacher action committee will have prepared a guideline for the next school year which will outline the year's activities, programs, as well as a list of goals to be accomplished by the committee. This plan will include data gleaned from this year's baptism from which will be shaped the next year's program.

9. An orientation evening will have been planned for incoming seventh grade parents and will be in place for September implementation. Prior to the

September meeting will be August planning sessions and meetings with incoming seventh grade parents.

10. A list of community organizations, clubs, groups and individuals will have been tabulated and presented to the PTO, administration and teachers' faculty as a database from which to draw support and intervention.

Measurement of Outcomes

The evaluation of this program was to be conducted through surveys, journals, interviews and tangible items of accomplishment. Written surveys were to be distributed to gauge the impact of the program on the parent population (See Appendix F).

Additionally, interviews with parents involved in the program's implementation and a random selection of parents who participated were to be completed during the program's implementation and served as a formative evaluation.

This same evaluation procedure was to be conducted with teachers, and students throughout the program. Surveys were completed by the students and teachers (see Appendix E and D respectively) during the final weeks of the practicum.

The specific evaluation of the outcomes were to be as follows:

1. Parental knowledge of honor/merit roll requirements were to be measured by the post-survey questionnaire (see Appendix F).
2. Parental requests for academic information were to be confirmed by checking the daily logs of the three guidance counselors.
3. Technical understanding by parents of CAT score jargon were to be assessed through the post-parent questionnaire (see Appendix F).
4. The bi-monthly newsletter was to be confirmed by its publications and notation in the writer's journal.
5. A core of parents are to form a Parent Awareness Group and have established an agenda for the coming school year.
6. An increase of parental assistance on homework was to be evaluated by the student post-survey questionnaire.
7. A number of meetings were to be held with both large gatherings of parents and small groups throughout the implementation period.
8. The Parent Awareness Group was to formulate a working framework for continued parental involvement.

Description of Results Analysis

The surveys were to be tabulated in percentages and matched with those taken in the pre-program surveys (see Appendices A, B, C). Using a form of causal-comparative research, the results of the pre-program survey were to be matched with those of the post-program and compared. In addition to finding a positive correlation between a greater flow of communication and parental awareness, also to be expected was a positive correlation between parental involvement and student success during the implementation of this practicum. The program's various solution techniques, i.e. (the newsletter, informational meetings, handouts, seminars and workshops) were the independent variables. The dependent variable, an increase in parental awareness was measured through the surveys, interviews and observations.

Respondents for the parent surveys were to be chosen through the use of a cluster sample design by school location. The surveys were to be completed by 72 parents representing the 14 schools in the District. To increase the confidence interval of the survey, respondents were to be selected through a stratified design so that an equal representation would be attained across the socioeconomic strand.

This was to be accomplished through a computer check of students' home addresses. Parent respondents were to have been chosen by virtue of the home address which would be matched with a house-market analysis of their location revealing a relative range of home cost. Students were to be identified on the socioeconomic scale by their home value ranging from lower than $35,000 to $200,000. For those students whose parents are renters, the scale would be achieved by identification of subsidized apartment complexes versus non-subsidized. Using this grid, the chosen parents were to be equally representative of the student population.

The student respondents were to have been selected in a stratified sample design consisting of 30.2% of the eighth grade. The confidence interval was to be strengthened due to the large number of respondents as well as an equal representation from the three ability groupings (honors, Regents, and basic). Names were not placed on the surveys; however in order to gain a correlation between student attitude and achievement, students were asked to record the end-of-year averages of the five academic subjects on the rear of the survey form. Each student was given this information confidentially.

The last evaluation was to be the process followed by the parents themselves as they prepared for the new school year. The Parent Awareness Group had formed a program of activities for incoming seventh grade parents into the new school year.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The literature is richly indicative that a positive correlation exists between parental involvement and student achievement. Vandegrift and Greene (1992) working with parents and students in the Arizona Morrison Institute, found that teachers were almost unanimous in their feelings that parental involvement had a tremendous effect upon student achievement levels, but that the difficulty lay in getting them to participate. Defining "involved" as parental commitment and active participation, these two researchers divided parents into four typical groups. The groupings ranged from Type One parents (supportive/active) to Type Four (non-supportive/inactive). Their conclusion was that the best way to involve the Type Four parents was to increase communication and go to the parents on their 'home ground' (p. 59).

A statistical basis for the effects of parental involvement can be found in a detailed and extensive research study completed by Seitz, Rosenbaum and Apfel (1985), who did a comparative study of two groups of

parents and children in a depressed inner-city area from 1968 to 1970. One of their findings was that a child who possessed an average or above average IQ was not assured success in school, but rather was directly affected by the parent and support systems for cognitive development (p.405). The study goes on to conclude that intervention of children at aged 30 months produced a linguistic advantage over children without parental intervention. Additionally, it was found that intervention children had good school attendance, were less likely to become involved in delinquency problems, and required fewer school services for remediation or other support aids.

In a study of eighth graders by Kurdek and Sinclair (1988), a positive correlation was found between family structure/environment and academic performance and school behavior. This study of 219 middle-class eighth graders supported the conclusion that end-of-year grades were higher for students who hailed from families which valued academic achievement and intellectual activities (p.94). Although this study found that students from step-families and father-absent families scored lower on end-of-year tests, the researchers noted the unreliability of the reporters (students) and of other variables such as middle

class-only samplings and length-of time for specific situations.

Accelerated schools in California using the Comer process and other partnership experiments demonstrate situations of parents and school officials working together in trust (Seeley, 1989). James Comer teaches that the contrast between home and school affects the psychological and social development of many youngsters - particularly poor, minority children (1991). The importance of trust and mutual respect are essential, Comer believes, in establishing a rapport between school and home (p.3). A positive climate for interaction in which the goals and expectations by home and school are the same - will enhance student achievement and behavior. Making decisions by consensus, meeting on a regular basis, involving all stakeholders in the process and involving parents in the government of the school, are all precepts of the Comer process (Hall, Henderson, 1991).

Other practioners such as Madeline Hunter (1989) and models such as Project TEACH (Merenda, 1989) and Parents as Teachers (PAT) (Caminiti, 1990), advocate a strong relationship between home and school with the parent as the independent variable. Parents and teachers alike are working together in many school districts to formulate programs which effectively increase

communication between school and home. These techniques range from the simple, such as phone calls by teachers to parents about a student's performance not only when it is negative, but also for commendable achievements (Wilkinson, 1988); to the creative, such as Patricia Davis' program of having her students write letters to their parents inviting them to write back and "talk" about their interests, their childhood and their opinions (1991).

The literature on parental involvement is rich with proof of its effectiveness and abundant with the methods available to activate participation. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) recommends that parents tutor their own children and monitor homework completion. Parental involvement is cyclical. In a spirit of high expectations, children will achieve more for reasons which go beyond the attainment of a numerical or letter grade. The parent and child are working together to solve problems, to achieve goals and consequently are making an investment in one another which strengthens the family bond and gives positive support to the child's development.

Rationale of Specific Solution Strategies

The essence of the solution strategy of this practicum was to emphasize proactive elements of a parental awareness program. The importance of trust

has been discussed in the literature and should be the leading edge of any solution strategy. Parents invited to initial organizational meetings were assured that their actions would be given serious consideration and representation.

A unique situation at this site is that scrupulous adherence to the contract between the district and teachers' union provides an effective but sometimes cumbersome organization. At times the contract precludes teacher involvement in areas outside the classroom. Notwithstanding this barrier, some teachers and staff are quite committed to the students and extend themselves in many ways to improve the standard of education. As expected, teacher involvement in this practicum came mostly from volunteerism.

Essential to the success of this program is that parents have ownership, investment in the activities which will directly affect their children. Accordingly, parents took on specific tasks related directly to the improvement of communication between home and school. A newsletter written by the parents was given full support and encouragement through the use of district mailing privileges, printing capabilities and computer use. The initial meetings took on a thematic approach as parents, teachers and students brainstormed ways to

increase not only parental awareness but community awareness of the school's policies, agenda and mission.

A group of parents formed a standing committee seeking to improve various aspects of the school environment and atmosphere. A particularly vital issue which became the focal point of this parent group, was the implementation of a middle school in place of the now existing junior high. The district has spent considerable time and resource in research and staff development for introduction of the middle school, but the program had stalled. The parent group launched a determined campaign to learn more about the middle school and how it could be implemented at the target school. A focal point of many meetings and newsletter material was the issue of the middle school.

The promotion of a sense of community and cooperation was generated through the parents' newsletter and through individual letters sent home to the parents. The Parent Awareness Group (PAG) encouraged participation in a proactive campaign to include community members on educational issues and problems. This effort was culminated in an educational forum organized by PAG which included a nine-member panel representing various community interest groups. The forum was videotaped and then televised on the local cable access station.

The overall solution strategy was to empower parents to become an active ingredient in school management through political access. The increase of home/school communication, which was the focus of this practicum, had as its purpose - parental inclusion in the education of their children based on the premise that learning is a cooperative venture between home and school.

Action Taken

This practicum began in the second semester of the school year and continued through the summer concluding with the layout of the first parent newsletter and assessment of surveys and interviews. Meetings with the superintendent and assistant superintendent were held to discuss the program and seek approval (See Appendix G).

Month One

School notices were sent to the faculty about the program with requests for volunteers. Verbal discussions with a number of the faculty provided a cadre of supporters to initiate the action of the practicum. At this time teachers completed a survey (See Appendix A). Parent and student surveys had been completed prior to implementation and used as hard data

for the problem stated in this practicum (See Appendix B & C).

The initial meeting was conducted with 74 parents in attendance and geared specifically to enjoin participants in a discussion format rather than the lecture. After an exchange of cookies, there was a short introduction of the goals and objectives (See Appendix H).

In order to facilitate a group format, parents were asked to write down three childhood events which they felt had great impact on their lives. These were shared in small groups and then discussed at large.

The exercise promoted a lengthy discussion on the importance of school life. In these groups discussion moved to ways in which increased communication between home and school could be improved. It became immediately apparent that the parents felt shut out from the school community and recognized that communication from the school either took the form of cursory reporting (computerized grade cards) or punitive announcements (detention, in-school suspension notices). Surprisingly to the writer, many parents were doubtful that efforts to include them in the education process would be successful. However, as events unfolded these early doubts proved to be a foreshadowing.

At this meeting the Parent Awareness Group (PAG) was established which set the trend and direction of future meetings. Two parents volunteered to send letters of summary to all parents who attended the meeting as well as a number of parents whose names were given by those in attendance.

Two parents petitioned the district office for a complete mailing list of every parent with children in the target school. From this list a database of parent names and addresses was established. The district also agreed to pay for mailing and printing costs of the newsletter.

During the last week of this first month, parents from the PTO, the Parent Awareness Group, and members of the District Committee on Education and Accountability were all asked by the principal to join a meeting of the teachers during an in-service day. This meeting degenerated into a hostile exchange between some teachers and parents over the validity of their presence in a professional gathering.

Month Two:

The second meeting of PAG was held with 15 parents attending. This group became the nucleus of the Parent Awareness Group. There was a lengthy discussion of the survey results with a great deal of comment on its

validity. A Communication Committee was formulated to organize a newsletter.

As a result of the hostility encountered at the in-service day meeting, the PAG members decided to create a blueprint for improving communication and increasing parental awareness. There was a lengthy discussion on what parents could do to improve and widen school communication with the home.

A great deal was spoken about teacher and parent relationships and the intimidation factor.

A notice to parents of upcoming meetings was written. Plans were made for the second large meeting of parents.

The Communication Committee orchestrated the gathering of material for the newsletter. Three parents used their own computers and home publishing capabilities to edit and assemble the first newsletter. Entitled *Reaching Out*, the first official communication is mailed to parents. The Communication Committee met to organize the next issue.

The second large meeting with all parents was delayed due to snowstorms. The PAG organizing group met to discuss the general plan for the remainder of the year. It was at this meeting consisting of six parents, the principal, three teachers and the writer that the issue of the middle school was broached.

Month Three:

The PAG group is now being generated by an Executive Committee comprised of eight parents, four teachers (one of whom is the writer) and the principal. At this point, the direction of the entire program diverts from the original implementation plan. A survey of parents contained in the first newsletter reveals a cool reception to a meeting where parents would engage in role-playing with teachers. The Executive Committee [of PAG] votes to discard the idea. The committee now focuses on the middle school concept.

Pamphlets were obtained from the local BOCES (Board of Cooperative Extension Services); and an entire parent newsletter was dedicated to an explication of the middle school concept. It was at this point that the school's principal took a more proactive stand on the middle school and began lobbying with the superintendent for trial programs. This was a reversal from his earlier stance that the junior high setting was more suited for our students.

The parent group petitions the principal and successfully gains use of a room on the second floor of the school for a parent office. It is equipped with file cabinet, phone, computer and access to a copy machine. The plan for a telephone tree is rejected by

the Executive Committee as too cumbersome and time consuming.

The committee establishes plans for the seventh grade orientation and an educational forum to include community members. The panel will consist of a drug awareness officer, a teens-at-risk specialist, pediatrician, the union president, the superintendent, a senior citizen council representative, a lawyer, a parent, a principal and a student. Questions will be asked of the panel after a three minute presentation of their duties.

Month Four:

Plans for the educational forum take shape as the committee meets regularly to organize the evening. Questions are formulated and given to a parent who will act as moderator. After much discussion, it is decided to allow the panelists to have copies of the questions and also to prepare to answer three initial questions regarding the theme: *Community Involvement in Education.*

Difficulty in getting all of the panelists to participate is encountered. Members of the Executive Committee are assigned a specific panelist to contact and attain confirmation.

Publicity of the event is assigned to other committee members. Plans include wide newspaper

announcements and a videotape to be made for broadcast on the local cable channel.

The forum takes place during the last week of this month. Poorly attended, the forum itself received widespread post discussion and activated some political aftershocks (See Chapter V under "Discussion").

Month Five:

The Executive Committee begins plans for an orientation program for incoming seventh grade parents and students. It was also decided to conduct a dual program separately for parents and students. The committee decides on a more personal interaction of student and teacher.

Notices containing a brief summary of the educational forum and plans for the orientation program are sent to parents. Additionally the third newsletter is printed and mailed. The entire issue is dedicated to the middle school concept, the focus of which has caused a reaction from the teachers' union.

The Executive Committee of PAG calls for a forum on the middle school. Parent reaction is mixed as news of the base closings and realignment generates concern over the loss of one third of the school population.

The parent orientation meeting is held and is well attended. Following brief speeches by the principal and vice-principal, parents listened to a panel of

eight teachers reporting on what incoming seventh grade students and parents should know, need and be concerned about. The program concluded with a tour of the building conducted by eighth and ninth grade students. In the closing week of this month's implementation, the student orientation program was held and attended by 72% of incoming seventh graders. The students were divided into classes of 25 and sent to individual rooms where they were engaged in discussion with a teacher and four students presently in seventh grade. This was followed by a guided student tour of the building.

Month Six :

The Communication Committee prepared the fourth newsletter. The Executive Committee reported on the many comments received by parents concerning the success of the orientation program and the educational forum. The District responded with a request for the PAG to organize four more forums for next year to be included in the district calendar.

The PAG decides to defer plans to become involved with the end of year ceremonies as it is contrary to middle school philosophy. There is much discussion concerning ability grouping in the junior high schools.

The Executive Committee discusses the means of political intervention for parent and student rights.

PAG members reveal a growing dissatisfaction with the school system's treatment of parents. It is decided that a letter of their feelings will be drafted and published in the local newspaper.

The Executive Committee discusses evaluation of the semester's gains and losses. Survey questions are formulated and agreed upon.

Student surveys are conducted by the writer.

Month Seven:

Due to the increased focus on the middle school concept, six teachers from the target school decided upon a pilot program to begin in the fall. The PAG cheerfully supports the move and agrees to assist in any way. The union's threat of a grievance throws the issue back into the political arena.

Disgusted parents publish the letter of dissatisfaction (Appendix J).

Telephone interviews are conducted to a random selected parent audience. Teachers, students, counselors, administrators and parents are interviewed.

The Executive Committee meets for a discussion of the next year's plans, establishment of rules committee, and outline of effective schools program involving parents.

Plans for opening day newsletter are discussed.

Month Eight:

The surveys are tabulated. The PAG group meets to discuss results and plans for the coming year. A modified middle school program is initiated by four eighth grade teachers with cooperation of the school principal on the master schedule for students and teachers.

The teachers' union intends to scrutinize the schedule to detect inequalities resulting from the trial program. Surveys are tabulated and evaluated. Preparations are made for publication of results. Recommendations are discussed for continuation and/or improvement of the program.

The school year's first newsletter is printed and published with the agenda for opening sessions of PAG at the end of the month.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this practicum was to establish increased parental awareness of the school's activities and programs through an expanded and improved communication network. The unexpected outcomes, however, shifted the focus from awareness to political involvement with consequences that are continuing and some which are yet undeveloped.

Results

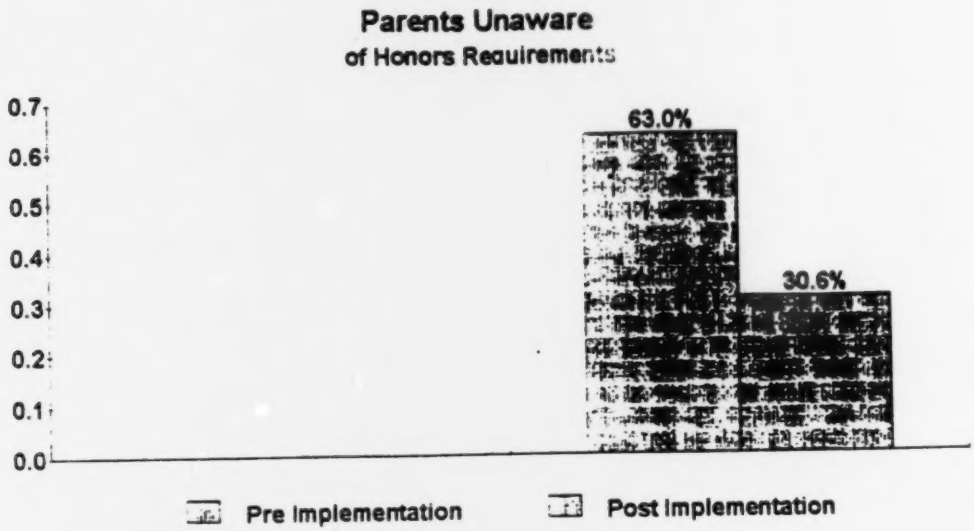
The objectives of this practicum were each achieved in varying degrees of success:

The first objective of this practicum was to increase parental awareness on specific academic areas relative to their children. The nonequivalence threat to the validity of the pre and post surveys was balanced by telephone surveys which were given to a stratified random sampling of the parent population of the school.

The first of the academic areas was information regarding honor and merit roll requirements. Figure 6 illustrates the increase of 26.4% over pre-implementation procedures. The relative success of

this objective is attributed to the widely disseminated newsletter which received much praise from the parent population. The expected outcome of 65% was not achieved most probably due to the mistaken perception of the writer that this was a major issue of importance for parents. Interviews with parents indicated that although they were very much interested in having their children achieve honor and merit roll status, it was not a central point of overall concern, as was safety and feedback from teachers.

Figure 6



The second objective was to increase parental communication with the guidance office on matters concerning student progress. Before implementation,

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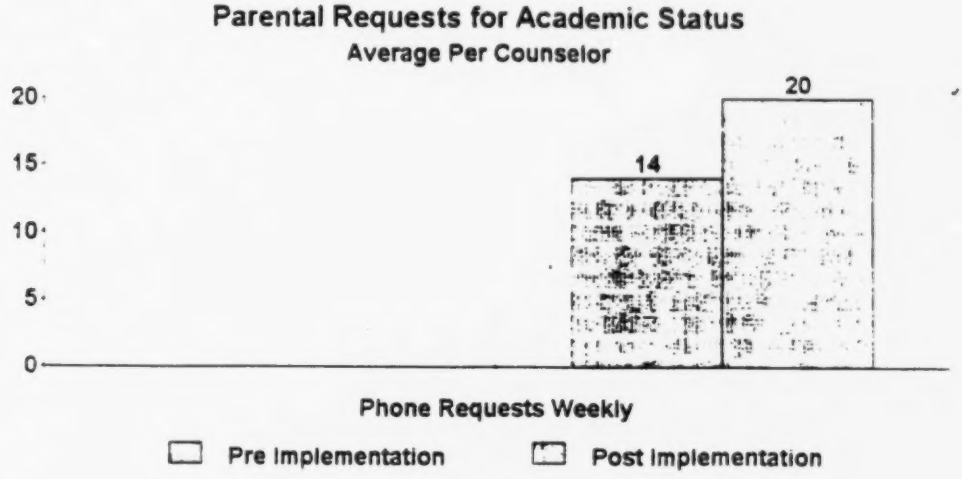
the three guidance counselors reported that approximately 10% of the parents of students assigned to them were requesting academic status. Following extensive publication of strategies to gain access to their children's scores and academic status, the counselors reported a rise to 17% of assigned students requesting weekly progress reports and a 30% rise in parental phone requests for student status. Figure 7 illustrates the numbers of parental requests for pre and post implementation as averaged per three guidance counselors.

Figure 7



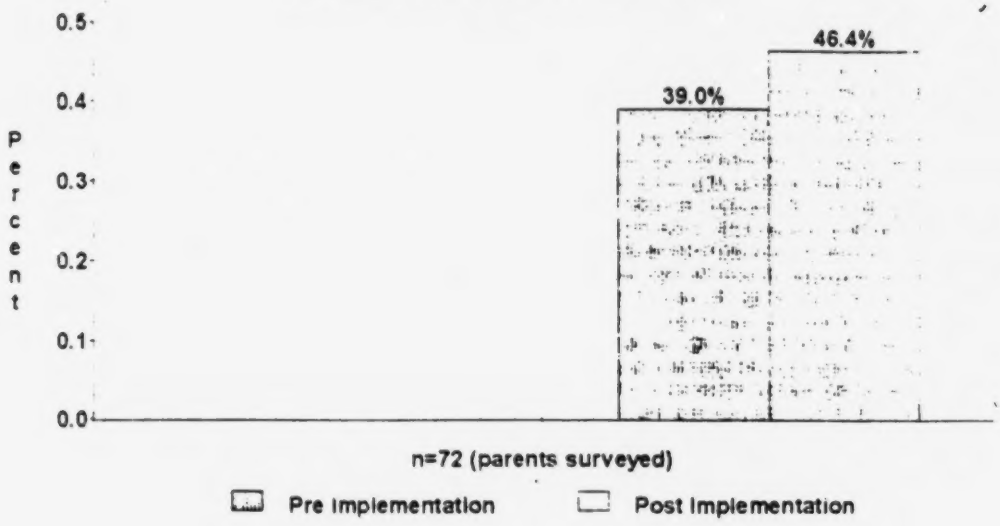
The third objective was to increase parental awareness concerning the CAT score procedures. The

pre-survey results showed a 39% awareness of the complex terms used in CAT scoring sheets. A modest increase of 15.4% was realized following publication in the newsletter of in-depth explanation of those terms. Figure 8 illustrates the results on this item in the post survey of parents.

The failure to attain the 65% expected increase may be attributed to parental confusion of standardized tests in general. Also, CAT scores do not in themselves indicate achievement levels by students on school related work; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that parents perceive no immediate value in having knowledge of CAT scoring terminology.

Figure 8

Parental Awareness of CAT Terms



The fourth objective of the implementation was to institute a parent newsletter which was energetically accomplished by the eager Parent Awareness Group. The second issue focused on issues specific to parent concerns and became the voice of parent activism. The success of the newsletter can be assessed through the numerous comments and responses from parents who cheered a line of communication which reflected actual events and issues relative to their school.

The fifth objective was to create a core of proactive parents who would be the vanguard of advocacy for both students and parents. This proved to be the pivotal point of the practicum as this core of parents sparked a political reaction that has opened discussion and debate on the middle school issue. Additionally, in the course of creating the next school year's calendar, the parents have developed a program of education debates/panels on issues pertinent to the clients, the students.

The sixth objective was to increase parental involvement in homework assistance. Pre-implementation data indicated a 24.7% parental assistance increased to 32.6% rate in the post data. Falling short of the 20% increase intended, the data may be unreliable due to the threat of reactivity. Adolescent bravado,

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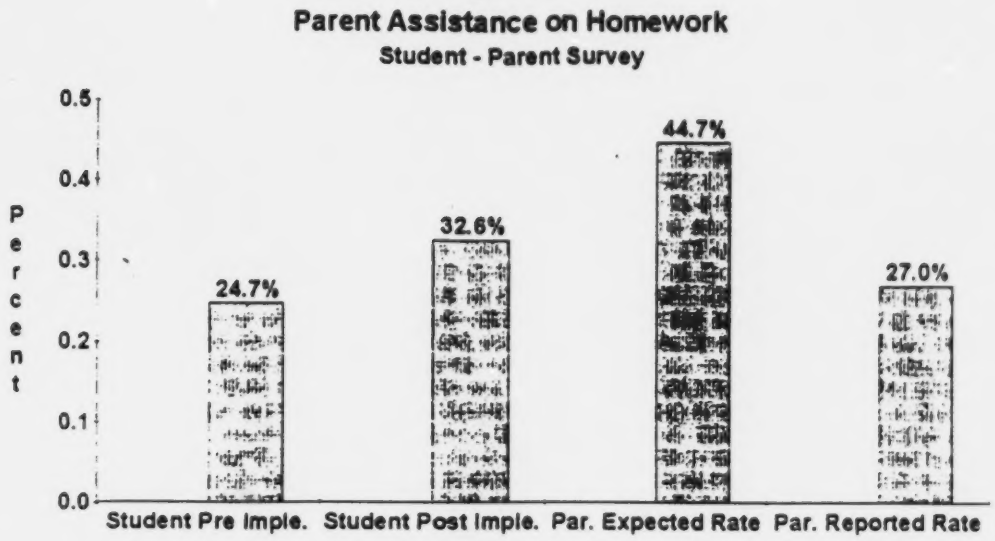
especially among boys, precludes admission of parental assistance on homework. However, in both telephone and written surveys, parents also indicated a lower than expected rate of assistance in homework (27%). Figure 9 illustrates the pre and post survey results from parents and students.

Figure 9

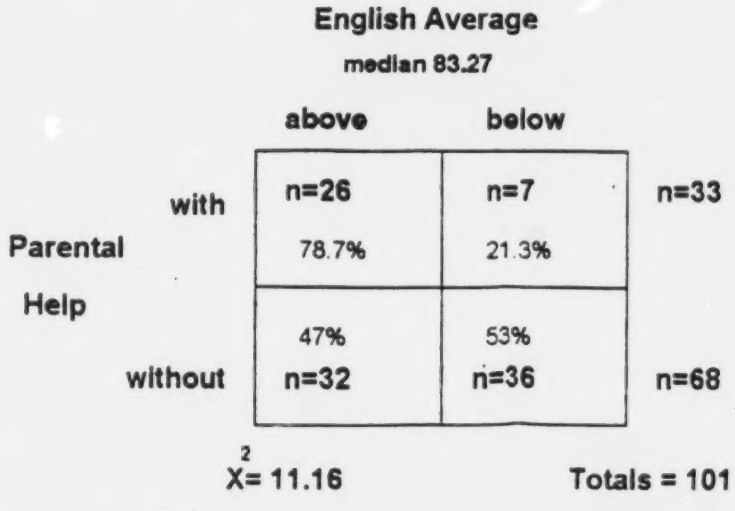


A most interesting result from the survey of students and parents given in the sixth and eighth months respectively, revealed a confirmation of the Kurdek and Sinclair (1988) study of family structure

and academic performance. Their study of 219 middle-class eighth graders found that parental values of academic achievement and intellectual stimulation in the home helped to bring about a higher grade curve for those students.

A stratified random sampling of 101 students was conducted within the purview of this practicum. A null hypothesis was presented as such: parental help with homework has no effect on a student's final English average above the median. Figure 10 reflects that a positive correlation is possible between parental attention and/or help with homework and a student's final average as it is positioned above the mean. A significant value of chi square found the variables to be associated in the population with no causal claim being made.

Figure 10



The students were selected randomly from the total population of 305 eighth graders. The threat of nonequivalence was neutralized in that all three ability levels were proportionately represented. The survey was dependent upon the truth of the respondents and certainly a threat to reliability was that of lying or understating.

Of the 66 students who scored above the mean, 60% of them reported parental help or attention with homework. The great surprise of this survey result was that that figure was not higher. A solid 34.7% of the students who scored above the mean reported no parental assistance or attention. This statistic is somewhat confirmed in the post survey of parents with 27% reporting assistance with homework.

The conclusions from the statistics pose interesting questions as to the parent/student relationship on the homework issue. Teachers in the post survey felt that inadequate homework was the major cause of low achievement. Not surprisingly, interview data with parents throughout the practicum implementation period consistently revealed that parents whose children were doing well (consistent standings on the honor and merit rolls), were more likely to provide an intellectually stimulating atmosphere at home.

The seventh objective was to implement a series of teacher/parent meetings to address academic, physical and philosophical problems relating to the educational process in the building. The first of these meetings was held during a teacher conference day with several parents in attendance. At this meeting there was a perceptible level of hostility by some teachers to having parents involved in professional aspects of the instructional agenda. The second meeting held at night and sponsored by the parents, was poorly attended by the teachers.

. At this point, it appears that this past the parents' attempts to become actively involved in their children's education has produced a gap between teacher and home. However, the core group of parents in PAG have used political strategies to gain a foothold in the educational policy-making arena. Accordingly, in spite of teacher resistance, the parents have succeeded in gaining recognition of their input.

The agenda for the coming year calls for more attempts to bring teachers and parents together for discussion of student specific problems.

The eighth objective was to establish an agenda for the coming year based on the initial formulation of the Parent Awareness Group. The eagerness of the core group of parents to become actively involved in the

school's programs was evident in their actions during the second semester as well as their plans for the next school year. Their intention is to place the parental role beyond fund-raising and to have impact on the instructional organization.

The ninth objective of instituting a more efficient orientation program for new students and parents was the strong point of the Group's achievements. The Executive Committee of PAG recognized that first-year parents would be more likely to become involved in school activities reasoning that their children were at the beginning of the three year tenure in the school. This provided an impetus to include these parents early - before their children come into the building. Therefore, the orientation program was moved to March rather than September. Separate programs for the parents and the students proved very effective and well-attended.

The final objective was for the parent group to assemble a packet of information to be used as a database for the ever-changing PTO membership. PAG assembled this packet which included the names of organizations and individuals who are willing to become involved in community-school activities. Additionally, the parents now have access to the names, addresses and phone numbers of every student's parent or guardian.

Discussion

The results of the three surveys given have provided information to help parents and teachers about future plans for this target school.

Surveys

The students' surveyed represented a random selection of the entire school. In spite of the threats to validity posed by the familiarity with the writer and preconceived notions of which answers were desired, the results were fairly consistent with those from interviews conducted by the writer and parents of the parent group throughout implementation.

Not surprisingly, the homework statistics reflected the expected positive correlation of parental help with higher achievement. Astonishingly, however, were the number of students who felt that their teachers did not genuinely care about them (33.6%). Taken with the students' feelings about school - (35% negative and 20% boring) - it would appear that the student-teacher relationship is generally disharmonious and unproductive to learning.

Although teachers felt an increase of parent/home communication in the building, and generally agreed that parental involvement is a priority (83% of those surveyed ranked it first and second) - there is a strong opinion that parents are not welcome in the

working classroom. This was confirmed in interviews with teachers from other buildings on other grade levels. It was especially apparent in the elementary grades, where parents are more likely to visit classrooms.

The Middle School

The results of this practicum demonstrate that when parents take a proactive stance towards the school community, an immediate obstacle is the existing power base of both teachers and their union. Knowledge of this power relationship and planning strategies to work within the school environment, are necessary precepts to any parental action for improved home-school communication.

Within one week, thirty-three parents formed a core action group citing improved school-home communication as its main objective. From this original group was formed a nucleus action committee of eight parents who took a very proactive position towards parental involvement. This nucleus opened the issue of the middle school concept. One parent raised a question during a PAG meeting in month two of the practicum implementation, relative to funds which were previously spent training teachers in the middle school concept. Once raised, the question was asked to responsible officials, which then brought about the reactivation of

former committees on the subject of the middle school.

Political reality came in the form of open opposition from the local teachers' union. Citing a lack of district organization on the middle school concept, and pointing to the district's covert desire to reduce teaching positions through a dissolution of tracking (ability grouping), the union used contract language to stall movement on any trial programs.

Although union objection diluted a proposal to run a pilot middle school concept program for the eighth grade during this school year, a group of eighth grade teachers have agreed to schedule changes which will at least allow for common planning periods - a basic pillar in the middle school structure. That program is being introduced as the precursor of a full-blown application of the middle school concept within three years.

The fact that both the district and the teachers are now engaged in a debate over the middle school, and that a trial program has been launched within six months of that parent's question, is testimony to the empowerment of parents and its effects on the school community.

As Table 1 indicates, the teachers in the target school are ambivalent on the middle school implementation.

Table 1

Teacher Ambivalence over the Middle School Concept

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Middle School Implementation	56.7%	35.1%	8.2%
Favored Ability Grouping	78.3%	21.7%	

Although favoring the concept of the middle school, the teachers in the target school are unwilling to adopt heterogeneous grouping which is a major component of the middle school concept.

In spite of this ambivalence from educators, the parents and this writer, with considerable input from the Executive Committee of PAG, generated a report incorporating the thoughts and suggestions of the parents in PAG. This report presents the case for middle school education as an embodiment of appropriate developmental practices for young adolescents. It emphasizes the benefits of increased home/school communication and the positive academic effects of interdisciplinary instruction.

Political Action

Probably the most far-reaching outcome of this practicum was its unexpected one. The parents who became involved in the Parent Awareness Group immediately recognized that many of the solutions to their problems with the school were political in scope. At the initial meeting with teachers in January, the

hostility encountered by the parents from the teachers created a battle-line situation. The Executive Committee of PAG, conscious of their precarious position vis-a-vis the teachers' union and the administration, made every attempt to veer from emotional responses or harangues, and sought objective solutions with reasonable goals.

For example, the formulation of the educational forum became an immediate controversy because some teachers refused to participate without union sanction. Additionally, one member of the panel, a parent, had already fought unsuccessfully with the superintendent on other issues. The Executive Committee undauntingly worked to allay the controversy by inviting a moderator who was respected by all sides of the issues. Also, the Committee defused emotionalism by screening out questions to the panel which were meant to antagonize.

In spite of the obvious lack of teacher support and administration ambivalence on the middle school program, PAG persisted in their campaign to disseminate information and garner support for implementation of the middle school concept. Their efforts were predicated by the group's belief that parents be given more voice in policy making at the school level. Appendix K is a letter sent by a member of the Group to the local newspaper. The tone of the letter is

indicative of the parents' frustration at being excluded from school decision-making.

In an effort to increase parental inclusion, the Group has scheduled four additional forums on issues of education as well as continuing their efforts to influence the middle school implementation.

The parent newsletter entitled *Reaching Out*, is now a permanent voice at the target school and has given the parents a channel of communication with each other in the school. Most importantly, this group, PAG, has moved parents from fund-raisers to activists seeking change for their children.

Another possible unexpected outcome of this practicum is the implementation of the middle school. It was the parents of PAG who rekindled the defunct committees on the program and who continue to focus attention on the need for this junior high to switch to the middle school configuration.

The middle school issue fostered debate beyond the needs of this junior high. Parental involvement on issues heretofore restricted to administration and teachers within the confines of their respective contract, has generated heated debate. However, New York State in their New Compact for Leaning, clearly mandates parental involvement in policy-making. It is only the lack of knowledge and strategy which is

preventing parents from taking the opportunity given them by the state. The PAG has gone a long way in providing that knowledge as well as generating some strategies which will begin as early as the fourth week in the new school year with the first general meeting of all parents.

Teacher Resistance

A clear unexpected outcome was the intensity of teacher resistance to parental involvement. Confirming the literature (Snider, 1991,) teachers at this target school were classic in their response to parental inclusion. During an in-service meeting of teachers and attended by parents (invited by the principal), one parent stated that she saw serious flaws in standardized testing and was convinced that portfolio assessment was a more accurate and balanced means of evaluation. The reaction of many teachers to parents being present during an in-service day was shocking in its bluntness. One teacher angrily retorted that parental input was not welcome as they [parents]were not professionals and could not contribute meaningfully to technical instructional matters.

The post-program survey conducted with 37 teachers in the building provided substance to a strong disinclination for parental inclusion at this school.

Table 2

Percentages of Teachers Intentions on Future Parental Inclusion

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Passive Involvement	35.1%	56.8%	8.1%
Active (in classroom) Involvement	40.5%	54%	4.5%

This negative viewpoint was supported by the tacit acceptance of the other teachers in attendance. This revelation shaded much of what the parent group did during the remainder of the year. Both the writer and other members of the Executive Committee of PAG had to exert considerable effort to keep parents involved.

Parental intimidation is a very real and unwelcome obstacle to their involvement in school policy making. Private conversations and interviews revealed the presence of strong unspoken belief by parents that their children are in danger (academic) if their teachers are in some way given reason to believe that parents are intruding in the school community. In some cases, parents actually felt that their children might be singled out or treated unfairly [in grading] by teachers who deemed parents to be interfering.

Recommendations

The entire process of this practicum, from planning through implementation and evaluation, has instilled in

this writer a confirmation of the need for and benefits of parental involvement in education. What became obvious almost immediately is that once parents are invited to participate, their inclusion provides a dimension which has impact on both student and teacher. This parallels Schlechty's belief that education must adopt a hospital/school approach - that is we must see the child in the entire picture of his or her life. Cultural considerations by practitioners is a growing movement in education and in some cases is the basis for a completely new approach to instruction and learning (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1993). We cannot exclude the family; we cannot grade a student's paper in isolation of that student's culture, learning styles, needs, strengths, weaknesses, talents, and short-comings. Parents have so much to offer in valuable, practical information about their child which, if used professionally, can only advance the course of learning for each student.

Political Access

Most significantly, this writer recommends that other practitioners attempting to stimulate parental involvement should consider the political atmosphere which surrounds the targeted community. The now established Parent Awareness Group is determined to become more politically involved to achieve their

goals. The systems analysis of Easton (1965) provides a frame of reference for parents wishing to access the school's policy-making structure. Exclusive focusing on values and concepts (i.e. quality education, vocational preparation, responsibility) only deflects parents from active involvement. To make an impact on the system, activists will need to concentrate on the access points of the system. One primary point is the support which is given to the system by the parent participant. Beyond campaigning for board seats, this means voicing questions, debating issues and engaging in discussion of the realities of school policy. The Group from this target school found access through open debate and discussion using publications and local cable access television.

The parent's letter of frustration (Appendix J) represents a utilization of the political process on a local level. The letter drew an angry (verbal) response from the union president, and a written one from a school board member. The implication of both those responses is that policy-makers and power partners are listening to the parents.

Communication

Communication of goals which may curb suspicion by interest groups such as teachers' unions, custodians,

principals and board members, will go a long way to allay fears of parental intrusion.

In reflection of this practicum's actions, the idea that parental involvement is not intrusive, should be a goal preceding any actions dealing with interest groups. Partners in education should be more than just subjects of pamphlets, and can be valuable if both teachers and parents understand their relative roles. It is essential that policy-makers and policy-doers understand that parents are not intruders, but seekers of information about their children's progress, and providers of information about their children's development. They wish to be asked and they wish to be told. In short, they wish to be respected in their role as parents, helped when they are frustrated, invited to participate in their children's triumphs, and instructed about their children's failings.

To achieve the goal of parents and teachers as partners, a great deal must be done through staff development in educating teachers of the value of parental involvement. Programs are needed which stress the essential data which parents can provide to engage in more appropriate instructional applications.

Systemic Reform Measures

The following recommendations were made to the Board of Education of the school district which was the

subject of this practicum. The thrust of the recommendations is to improve parental involvement through a series of systemic reform measures and without a substantial increase in budgeting or changes in staff. Although these recommendations are specific to the target school district, they may be generalized to any school community interested in improving home/school communications and expanding parental awareness.

What follows is a summary of those recommendations: **To provide district parents with a program of involvement** the District should launch a program of which might include the following:

improved telephone communications about homework or other questions on curriculum or instruction; answer phones are inexpensive and easily connected;
invitations for parents to visit classrooms to view or participate in a project or lesson;
a change in attitude of front office personnel in all school facilities to one which recognizes the importance of the parents' presence and acknowledges their status;
arrange for easier access to school buildings after hours so that children may retrieve materials from their classroom or lockers;
provide a wider scope of information from testing dates of SATs to college requirements in writing or social studies;

clarify rules and regulations pertaining to special education and the rights and responsibilities of parents;
publish a newsletter which includes parent and student writing;
provide an outreach program to families at risk;
institute evening classes in parenting and child care for single mothers and/or fathers;
institute parenting classes for pregnant students as well as counseling services during the pregnancy and after the baby is born.

Although there are a number of lines open for communication between teachers and the administration, other groups such as parents, teachers, and the public at large do not have easy access to the system to voice their concerns.

Therefore, **to provide open communication to all stakeholders**, an ad hoc committee of parents, students, teachers, administrators, board members, custodians, and school-related personnel must be formed to address the issues in conflict. That committee should have power to enact legislation and change. It is essential that the committee quickly establish by-laws and a constitution and gain sanction from both the Board of Education and the teachers' union. All efforts should be made to prevent this committee from dissolving into lip-servicing front for reform.

To provide a forum for discussion of education issues a professionally published newsletter should be sponsored by the District and provide a pipeline for information to all citizens of this community. Included in this communication would be a number of references to state and federal programs for parental involvement and the latest educational initiatives. Additionally - periodic surveys of parents, students, teachers and administrations as well as the public at large, would be published to give a perspective of community opinion.

To provide teachers and administrators with an ongoing databank of content and process in the latest education initiatives, the District should increase its subscription to professional journals and research documents and distribute them widely to the instructional staff. Also, by inviting nationally recognized experts in education to speak to the instructional staff on topics of learning and human development - the district will help to generate a professional environment which is so essential to growth.

To provide students with a representative body the District should allow for the establishment of a student organization with representatives from every school and grade level. This body should have the power

to request legislation from the school board on issues relative to the welfare of the students.

Students from every school should be represented as well as a secondary representative body in each school comprised of students from every grade level. This student participation in the democratic process would also serve as an excellent educational tool.

To provide direction and unity of purpose for our school system, the District should adopt a total quality management style providing for the establishment of a mission statement, feedback and communication to all staff and students, and a systematic revision process that attends to achieving the stated goals. This would involve stating those goals in terms of services provided - knowledge, wisdom, cognitive training, problem solving, development of systems. Included would be parental participation on a scale heretofore unknown in this district.

A widespread dissemination of the mission statement would help to unify the action of teachers and principals. Central to this statement would be an agreement on what educators expect of the students inclusive of parental opinions and help.

To increase accessibility to the system and transcend political roadblocks, the District should

engage an ombudsman and director for information to be made available to all stakeholders. This person would navigate specific problems through the myriad of regulations and procedures of the educational establishment. Parents puzzled by special education rules on testing or on attendance requirements need only call the ombudsman to receive answers or explanations and possibly names and phone numbers for additional help. Teachers looking for specific texts, resource materials or even addresses and phone numbers of experts, could call on the ombudsman for help.

Dissemination

The contents of the entire practicum will be made available to the parents who participated as well as to the teachers who assisted throughout its implementation. The recommendations in Chapter V of this practicum will be made available to members of the local school board. This will be supplemented by an oral report to be given by the writer in executive session on the September board agenda.

Additionally, officers of the local teachers' union will be given copies of Chapter V of this practicum with a recommendation that a liaison be formed with parents on educational issues. Statistics,

charts and survey results will be made available within the context of both parent newsletters and teacher newsletters published in the target school.

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Appendix A

PARENT SURVEY

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR ANSWERS

1. I believe that children do not get enough homework.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

2. I help my children with homework regularly.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

3. I would like more information about my child's homework assignments.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

4. I fully understand the requirements for my son or daughter getting on the honor or merit rolls.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

5. I think that most children watch too much television.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

6. In our home, our children have a place set aside just for homework.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

7. Sometimes, I find that I do not understand the homework assignments.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

8. I believe that rules for behavior are necessary for both home and school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

9. I think that our school has enough rules regarding behavior.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

10. I feel comfortable about my child's safety and well-being when he or she is at school each day.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

11. I would like more information about events, activities and policies at our school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

12. I very often get frustrated at my child's behavior at home.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

13. I often share stories and ideas with my friends about raising children today.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

14. Usually I and/or my spouse tell our children what we expect them to do.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP
78.3 17.4 8.7

15. Each child in our household has a set list of jobs to perform each week.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

16. In our house we discuss almost all decisions of the family with our children.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

17. I believe that school should do more than just teach kids to read, write, and figure.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

18. I believe that my child's teachers have their (the child's) best interests at heart.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

19. I fully understand the terms *stanines* and *percentiles* on the CAT score sheets which my child brings home occasionally.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

20. I am not sure how IQ is scored..
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

21. I do not know what my child's IQ score is.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

22. I believe that putting students in classes by ability (honors, average, basics)is best for the students.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

23. I know what course my child needs to take to receive a high school diploma.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

24. I want my child to attend college.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

25. I think that the school year should be longer than 10 months.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

26. The best time for me to come to school for meetings is after school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

27. The best time for me to come to school for meetings is in the evening.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

28. I believe that schoolwork should be more challenging or difficult.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

29. I feel that the school district is very good at communicating with parents about what's going on.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

30. In the past when (or if) my child was having difficulty in school, I would call the guidance counselor.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

31. I feel at ease contacting my child's teachers about his/her progress.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

32. I think more parents should chaperon dances.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

33. I feel that this school has enough after school activities.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

34. If I have a complaint about something concerning the school, the behavior code, or the way it is run - I know exactly which person to contact.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

35. By law I have a right to see my child's records which are kept by the school system.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

36. I believe that the report card is the best gauge of how my child is doing in school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

37. I think that my child could do much better in school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

38. I think that the best learning comes when the teacher is at the front of the room and the students are seated quietly listening.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

39. In the past year I attended PTO meetings
once twice three times more

40. In the past year, I have contacted the school about my child's academic performance at least once.
yes no

41. I completely understand the school's discipline code and my responsibilities regarding my child's behavior.
yes no

Appendix B

STUDENT SURVEY

I am a girl. I am a boy. (circle one)

Please respond to all of the following statements by circling the word or words which you feel best tells what you feel or think about the statement.

1. I go to school because I have to.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

2. I like to go to school because I like to be with my friends.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

3.I get in trouble with my parents if I don't do my homework.
YES NO SOMETIMES

4. I have a special place in my house just to do homework.
YES NO

5. When I am doing homework I usually play the radio or t.v.
YES NO

6. I honestly think I could handle more homework.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

7. I like for my parents to help me with my homework.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

8. All of my teachers assign homework at least twice a week.
YES NO

9. Some teachers assign homework every night.
YES NO

10. I feel that teachers treat my homework with the same amount of care that I put into it.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

11. I feel that this school is a comfortable place to come to each day.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

12. I feel that if we have a substitute, it means a free day for us in that subject.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

13. If I could, I would come after school to get extra help in subjects that are giving me trouble.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

14. I do better in a subject when I know I am getting graded.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

15. Getting on the Merit or Honor Roll is very important to me.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

16. My guidance counselor should be more available to me to discuss my progress in school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

17. If I have a question about how I am doing in school, I would go to my parents.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

18. If I have a question about how I am doing in school, I would go to my homeroom teacher.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

19. If I have a question about how I am doing in school, I would like to go to another teacher or adult.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

20. Sports after school is one of the best reasons for coming to school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

21. Doing projects in technology class is a high point in my school day.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

22. I am usually uncomfortable and tense when I am in school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

23. Most of the school's rules and regulations make sense to me.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

24. I feel that the teachers really care about me.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

25. I see the school as a place that feels like it belongs to me.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW
G0.0/B4. G43.3/G12. G6.6/B12.G50./B72.

26. If I get a detention I don't want my parents to know about it.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

27. Getting In-school suspension is about the worst thing that I think could happen to me at school.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

28. I think the class periods are too long.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

29. I wish I could learn more about a different language.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

30. There should be longer gym periods.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

31. There should be more school activities after school.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

32. Getting dressed up for school is very important to me.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE DON'T KNOW

33. I have my own bedroom at home.
YES NO

Appendix C
Teacher Survey

Please answer all questions with the following responses:

AGREE - you agree with the statement as it stands
DISAGREE - you disagree with the statement as it stands
STRONGLY AGREE - you very strongly concur with the statement
STRONGLY DISAGREE - you very strongly disagree with the statement
NO OPINION - you have no opinion or you do not feel that an answer is necessary,

1. Administrivia diminishes my effectiveness as a teacher.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

2. I do not think that a substantial change is necessary in our national education structure.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGRE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

3. I know that change is necessary, but I don't think it's within my power to make it happen.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

4. I believe that the numerical grading system best evaluates a student's progress.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

5. Performance-based assessment is valuable but too expensive, time-consuming and cumbersome.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

6. Knowledge is the product - the student is the client.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

7. I think of myself as a facilitator.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

8. Teaching is 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

10. I feel that for the most part, administration is a barrier to the educational process.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

11. I think that we need a national curriculum.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

12. I think that we should have an integrated curriculum. (i.e. social studies English, math, science, etc. taught in tandem).
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

13. I believe that teacher-centered learning is best for the student.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

14. Collaborative learning is too difficult in a junior high school setting.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

15. A school of this size should have two more guidance counselors.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

16. I think the school day should be extended so that more material can be covered.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

17. I would be in favor of a creative scheduling model whereby I could spend more than 40 minutes with a class at least twice a week.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

18. I think that the use of profanity by students is on the rise.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

19. I am in favor of a dress code for students.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

20. I think that there should be more student assemblies.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

21. I think that my class is interrupted more frequently than necessary.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

22. I would welcome my peers to observe my teaching strategies.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

23. I would welcome parents to come into my classroom to observe.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

24. I would welcome parents in my classroom to participate.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

25. I would be willing to work with parents in groups on a few evenings during the year.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

26. I think that homework is necessary.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

27. I think that homework reinforces what was taught during the day.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

28. I honestly don't know what the term "mastery learning" means.

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AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

29. I think that parents should have the right to choose any public school for their children.

AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NO OP
53.3	40.			6.7

30. I don't mind giving parents an outline of what their child will miss due to a vacation on school time.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

31. I think that for the most part, students are comfortable here at the school.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

32. I think that technology has been overplayed in its use for education.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

33. Multiculturalism doesn't apply to our setting here at Strough.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

34. I think that there should be an increase in communication between parents and school/teachers.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

35. I would be in favor of site-based management.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

36. I would be in favor of some form of shared-decision making here at the school.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

37. I think that parents should be more involved with the learning process of their children here at school.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

38. President Bush's America 2000 project for schools is the best hope for American education.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

39. I am in favor of strong education reform in the United States.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

40. I believe that the present system is effective but that outside forces are causing it to malfunction.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

41. I believe that students who do not meet the requirements should not be passed into the next grade.
AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

42. The students are not failing the grade - the school is failing the students.

AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

43. Every child can learn.

AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

44. There is a correlation between successful achievement and IQ - with the school being an independent variable.

AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

45. I would welcome and contribute to a professional newsletter which focuses on the issues and strategies of teaching, learning and education.

AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

46. I think that test modifications are unfair to the student who does NOT receive resource help.

AGREE STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

Appendix D
TEACHER SURVEY
(Post Program)

This survey was completed by 37 teachers in the target school.

Please respond to each statement or question below as indicated.

1. I have noticed more parental involvment in this building since January.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

2. I have noticed an increase in parental requests for progress reports and homework since January.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

3. I feel that there has been an increase in collegial discussion on topics relative to the education system.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

4. I have been aware of more activities, programs and events occuring in the building since January.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

5. My intentions for the next school year are to become more actively involved with parents than I was last year.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

6. I encourage parents to become involved but I don't want them in my classroom while I'm teaching.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

7. I believe that the middle school should be implemented here at _____.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

8. I am in favor of a change in the tracking (ability grouping) program here at _____.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

9. I believe that there has been a general increase in communication within this building's education organization.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OP

10. Please rank the following educational priorities from 1(greatest) to 5(least):

__national standards
__national certification of teachers,
__increased federal funding,
__outcome-based education?
__parental involvement

Appendix E
STUDENT SURVEY
(Post Program)

This survey was completed by 101 students.

Please read the following questions and statements and give answers or responses that best describe how your honestly feel about the topics of each of them.

Please do not put your name on this sheet. On the reverse please copy your last six marking period grades as your teacher gives them to you.

1. I have a special place in my house just to do homework.
YES NO

2. In general, did you feel that your teachers genunine ly cared about you this year?
YES NO SOMETIMES(other comments)

3. Do your parents help you with your homework (on average)
once a week twice a week every night (not at all)

4. Do your parents ask if you have any homework (on average)
once a week twice a week every night (not at all)

5. What do you think the CAT tests are for?
(Answers varied. Most answers were sarcastic and reflected students' discomfort with test. 24 answered that they were to gauge progress).

6. What one word best describes school for you?
Negative Response "Boring" Positive Response Neutral

7. Which subjects do you think you could do without?

8. My parents have attended at least ONE, TWO, MORE DON'T KNOW
school functions this year.(please circle one)

Appendix F
PARENT SURVEY
(Post Program)

This survey was completed by 72 parents.

Please respond to each question below as indicated by circling your choice.

1. I believe that my child's homework habits have improved.
YES NO NO OP

2. I have been more involved with my child's homework this year.
YES NO NO OP

3. I feel that I have been well informed of the events, activities and programs of the school.
YES NO COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER INFORMED NO OPINION

4. Communication with my child's guidance counselor has been very good and productive.
YES NO SOMEWHAT HAVE HAD NO REASON TO SPEAK WITH HIM/HER NO OPINION

5. Communication with my child's teachers has generally been good and productive.
YES NO SOMEWHAT HAVE HAD NO REASON TO SPEAK WITH HIM/HER NO OPINION

6. The atmosphere of the school has been friendly towards me and my child.
YES NO SOMEHWAT NO OPINION

7. I feel that the school has my child's best interests at heart.
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NO OPIN

8. I understand and support the school's behavior code.
YES NO SOMEWHAT NO OPINION

9. I have changed my opinion on at least one point or issue of education during the past year.
YES NO NO OPINION

10. I am familiar with the terms *stanine* and *percentiles* as they appear on my child's CAT score sheets.
YES NO SOMEWHAT

11. I know what my child's I.Q. score is.
YES NO NO OPINION

12. I believe that putting students in classes by ability
(honors, average, basics) is best for the students.
YES NO SOMEWHATNO OPINION

13. I believe that the report card is the best gauge of how my child is doing in school.
YES NO SOMEWHATNO OPINION

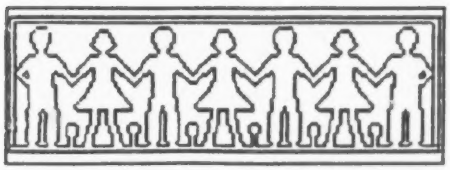
14. I am fully aware of the requirements for my child to get on the honor or merit rolls.
YES NO SOMEWHAT NO OPINION

15. In the past year I have chaperoned at least one dance.
YES NO NO OPINION

16. In the past year I have attended at least one school function.
YES NO

17. In the past year I have attended at least one PTO meeting or function.
YES NO

Appendix G



Parent Awareness Program
Background Information

Research has shown that parental involvement has a positive impact on a child's behavior and academic achievement. Also - it shows that parents who take an active role in their children's education, have a positive relationship with the school and can help impact the services provided by the system.

Research and studies on learning are vast, complex and often in disagreement. However, recent focus on collaborative learning is based on the theories of Howard Gardner and his theory of multiple intelligences, Ivan Vygotsky and his theory of the zone of proximal development as well as the always applicable theories of Jean Piaget.

The essence of their learning and developmental theories is that children learn at their own pace, that collaborative learning best facilitates learning, that positive intervention in cognitive development can affect learning outcomes, and that interactions of peers, teachers and parents have both positive and negative affects on a child's learning success.

PARENT AWARENESS PROGRAM RATIONALE

The program will have one goal with two objectives:

The goal: empower parents to have a positive impact on their child's behavior and academic success.

The objective: increase parental awareness
increase communication between school and home.

The concept of the program is a simple application of what we know to be true in learning development. Making parents aware of what other parents are doing with their children is a form of cooperative learning. The increased awareness which will come from parents interaction, solving common problems related to their adolescents, generating ideas and becoming a unified group - will have a positive affect on their children's academic and behavioral success here at Strough.

Topic Workshop One: Establish tenets of program. Engage parents in creative problem solving. Discuss alternative solutions to problems with adolescents. Discussion of what we know will follow.

Topic Workshop Two: Role playing. Dealing with specific teen problems: homework, dress, music, authority. Teachers invited to

discuss classroom technique - viewpoint of the teacher vis-a-vis the parent.

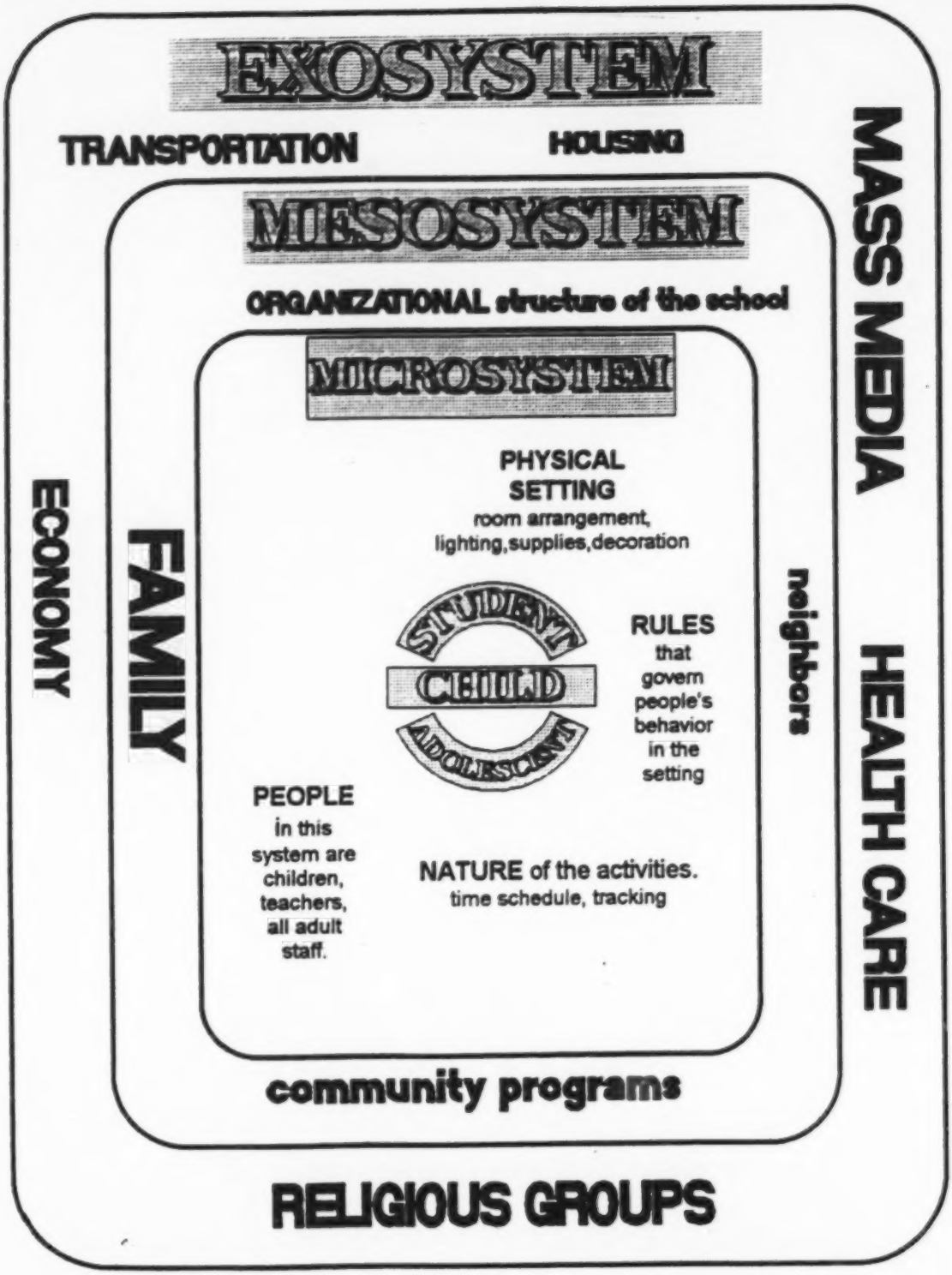
Topic Workshop Three: Informative. Discussion of parental rights by federal, state and local statutes. Discussion of parental responsibilities. Guest speaker on legalities and rights.

Topic Workshop Four: Career choices. Discussion of avenues for their children - college, vocations. Courses available at high school, choices to be made. Counselors and teachers invited to discussion.

Workshop Five, Six?: Topics and direction by this time will be completely up to the parents. At this point, school personnel's role should be advisory and as audience. What happens from here may be anybody's guess.

The Newsletter: A parent/teacher/student organized and published newsletter will present opinions, information and ideas. It will also establish communication to parents who are not attending but may benefit from what is being accomplished.

Final Note: It should be noted that this program should not resemble a typical neo-fifties PTA organization whose main objective is to raise money and come to awards ceremonies. It is to empower parents to deal with their children in the unique period know as adolescence and to increase the communication between school and parent.



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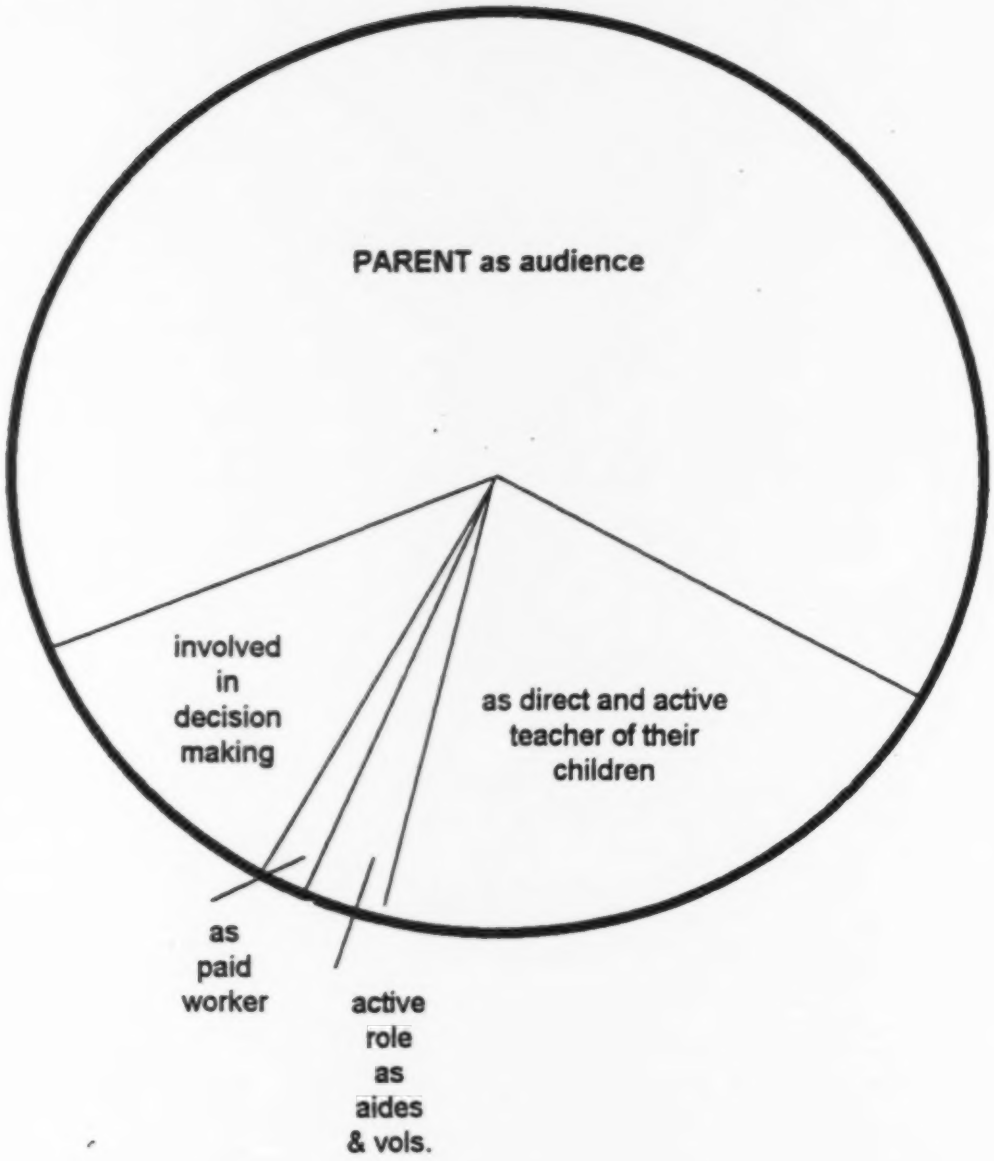
Parental Involvement Paradigm

(constructed from the Ira Gordon model)


PARENT as audience
involved in decision making
as direct and active teacher of their children
as paid worker
active role as aides & vols.

Appendix H

PARENT AWARENESS PROGRAM

Introduction: Goals and Objectives

To increase parent awareness of their school, of the process educating their children, and of the children themselves;

To improve the communication between home and school;

To develop a proactive community of parents, teachers and students whose objectives will be to improve the educational environment.

Philosophy:

The welfare and development of the child is the ultimate concern of the adult caregivers. There is no other goal but that which gives the child the best opportunities to develop to his or her greatest potential.

The following philosophy is suggested as a guide to the structure of this program:

Every child has the right to feel loved.
Every child has the right to feel that they belong.
Every child has the right to grow in competence.
Every child is a part of something larger than him or herself.
Every child is included.
Every child has the right to be thought of as a consultant.
Every child has the right to know that life is filled with many adventures - which includes taking risks.
Every human being has the right to be held high in the esteem of others.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION AREAS FOR THE PARENT-TO-PARENT EVENING

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Typical Conflict Starters:

struggle over territory - room, t.v. areas
treating the adolescent like a child
constant correction of adols. behavior
mothers who try to be friends
mothers and fathers who preach
manipulation and emotional blackmail
discussion of the adols' behavior to outsiders
lack of faith in adols' future responsibility
adolescent idealism - adult realism
adols' expectation of parental support and understanding
all out attacks
personality attacks, esteem and constant criticism
parents who push for excellence
adolescent anxiety over disappointing mom and dad
parents' concern for daughters
parental understanding of outside stress on adolescent
adolescents' need for verbal expression of father's love
mothers acting as though they the adolescent
mothers' involvement in adols' private lives
maternal domination
paternal domination
parents using their own past as basis for comparison
permissiveness and evading responsibility to child

These can be developed into specific situations from the following categories:

condition of the bedroom
arguments for or against having tv in the bedroom
sibling fights over clothes, food, tv
household job expectations and the "fairness" issue
money for dates, clothes, games, etc.

Other possible discussion areas:

Expectations - of father, mother, adols
Expectations of the school towards the family
Definition of the family in 1992-93
Issues that impact family, school, individual
Music, dress, customs, culture, religion
Long range goals for teens, for parents

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Home-School Relations

- Does the school ensure that parents are informed of what the school's goals are andtheir role in achieving them;
- Does the school use various means to communicate with parents: telephone calls, handbooks, newsletters, school and class meetings, parent/teacher conferences, notes home, local press, and informal meetings;
- Do parents initiate contact with the school openly and frequently to discuss and support student academic progress;
- Do parents actively participate in school activities such as concerts, athletic games, parent-teacher conferences, booster clubs, school improvement advisory council and informal groups;
- Is the school's homework policy stated in writing and are parents actively supporting it with their children;
- Is the attendance policy stated in writing and do parents see that their children are in school;
- Do parents know and support the school's discipline policy and encourage positive student behavior;
- Does the school give parents opportunities to design and participate in parent education programs;
- Does the school encourage parents to visit their children's classrooms;
- Is the school community encouraged to help the school reach its goals through such activities as adopt-a-school projects, senior citizen involvement programs, school volunteer programs, educational foundations, exchange programs with local businesses, and/or direct financial support for special programs.

(This checklist was compiled by the Florida School Advisory Council and is used as a guide in many school districts across the country).

A Call To Action by Roberta J. Cavano of the Parents Awareness Group

Parents:

You're doing your best to juggle pressures from all sides - work, kids' activities, household chores, the financial and moral responsibility for raising your children - and have precious little time to waste. *Only* because there is so much at stake for your children's future, please take the time to consider the following:

School teachers, as a group, have their organization and advocates and procedures to make demands and have them dealt with;

School administrators, as a group, have their organization and advocates and procedures to make demands and have them dealt with;

School support staff, as a group, have their organization and advocates and procedures to make demands and have them dealt with;

School board officials, as a group, have a structure and procedures to make demands and decisions that affect all our lives (in taxes and preparation for our futures through education);

Parents and students, as a group, have NO structure, NO advocates, and NO procedures to make demands and have them dealt with. The general attitude from educators toward parents seems to be one of appeasement—"Give them something to do (primarily raising money) through the PTG and it will look like we're letting them be involved. Keep 'em busy. They'll be satisfied."

Well, wake up and smell the discontent. Some of us parents are tired of the lip service and the rhetoric and the token representation on do-nothing committees. We find invitations to school board meetings insulting...why waste our time venting our spleens only to have the august body remain silent as they play the role of patient listeners, and then move on to business as usual? Parents can't waste time going through ancient rituals paying homage to the board. We have children to raise and keep out of trouble.

Many parents will MAKE time, however, to engage in meaningful dialogue—give and take, negotiation if necessary—to get what they want for their children: the best education available. A growing number of us are beginning to realize what educators have known all along—there is strength in numbers, and we want a structure that will force educators to acknowledge parents' rights as equal partners in their children's education.

One-on-one meetings are fine when there are personal issues to be resolved, but they are ineffective in addressing the education issues facing our children and the community today. In these cases, one-on-one meetings are little more than comments without commitment, promises with no witnesses, agreement without action.

Overheard in a school office:

"Gee, I'm the one who took that message for you, but I forgot to ask who was calling. Was it something important, or was it just a parent?"

The New York State Board of Regents New Compact for Learning empowers parents to have a voice in the education of their children. The time is ripe for parents to work, *as a group*, to make that voice loud and clear.

Changes in society demand that we make this a priority.

The Parent Awareness Group at Strough has made some progress this past year communicating with the school district and getting some things done: an orientation for incoming seventh-graders and their parents; a newsletter to Strough Parents; sponsoring a forum on community involvement in education. They have set an agenda for four public forums in 1993-94 where parents can find out about things that affect their children's lives: the Excellence and Accountability Program; the Middle School concept; planning for life after high school before it's too late; and teenage sexuality.

With more participation—a stronger unified voice—parents can help create a structure that elim-

continued on page 10

A Call to Action

continued from page 2

inates the "us" against "them" mentality that cripples communication. We need a neutral forum where parents and students can ask questions and make suggestions without fear or reprisal, where parents and students are respected as partners in the process.

This is not an impossible task. Communities all over the state and nation are engaged in the process and the children are reaping the benefits. The key is ATTITUDE—the belief that this is a good and possible direction—and ACTION.

Haven't heard of the New Compact? Interested in making a difference? Write to the Parent Awareness Group, c/o the Rome Observer, for a copy and information on how you can become involved.

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